Babies, Bodies, and Books—Librarians' Work for Early Literacy

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Abstract

This article reports on an empirical study of children's librarians' activities supporting the development of literacy among very young children. The theoretical framework stems primarily from a LIS practice-theoretical perspective where literacy is viewed as corporeal practice. The empirical material consists of a transcript from one focus-group interview with seven children's librarians, and field notes from a series of seven documented observations of program sessions at three public libraries in Sweden. A qualitative content analysis was undertaken, and the empirical material was interpreted with an analytical focus on the concepts of *literacy activities*, *embodiment*, and *literacy practices*. The study shows how bodies act as sites of information and communication. Not only the bodies of the librarians but also the bodies of parents and the children acted as central sites, affecting literacy practices during library programs. The librarians express that their engagement in professional practice has resulted in a certain bodily sense for finding the right level of communicating with babies. The librarians have also learned to trust this embodied judgement as part of their professional expertise.

Introduction

This article reports on an empirical study of library activities supporting the development of literacy among very young children (three to nine months old). The aim of the study is to understand how certain literacy activities for babies and parents, such as library programs,[1] are part of more complex social practices where literacy is mediated, enacted, and expressed. Bodily aspects of the participants' interactions and the shaping of professional knowledge within the specific literacy practice constitute

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analytical focal points in the analysis. The theoretical framework stems primarily from a library and information science (LIS) practice-theoretical perspective where literacy is viewed to a great extent as grounded in corporeal experience. Annemaree Lloyd's writings on embodied information practices (e.g., 2009, 2012, 2014) have influenced the study by emphasizing how the ability to recognize and attend to information is created through physical experience (Lloyd 2014, 88).

There is an increasing interest in the body within practice-theoretical research. Nevertheless, this stream of work has also met some critique. Maller (2017, 72), for instance, points out that bodies tend to have "a present-absent status" in theories of social practice; present by being described as carriers of a practice, but absent in the way that "their physical and sensory qualities are largely unrecognised or *dematerialised*." In this study various physical and sensory aspects of experiencing information come through as literacy activities, and the intricate interactions within library program sessions for very young children are analyzed. The empirical findings are also put into perspective by research on professional knowledge (Abbott 1998; Nolin 2008) and previous studies of librarianship (e.g., Harris 1992) as a typical female-intensive profession.

The following research questions are addressed:

Q 1. In what ways does the body play a constitutive part in the *literacy activities* of public libraries' programs for very young children?
Q 2. How do corporeal aspects relate to the librarians' professional work and knowledge?
Q 3. How may the literacy activities for very young children be understood as parts of an overall embodied literacy practice, and what does this imply?

A combined-methods approach has been used to generate the empirical material needed for this qualitative investigation.

Previous Research

Empirical research on library programs for young children is scarce, mostly consisting of applied research reports (e.g., Barratt-Pugh and Allen 2011; Knoll 2014; Borrman and Hedemark 2015; see also articles in the thematic issue of *Library Trends* 2016, ed. by Rankin). McKechnie (2006), Stooke and McKenzie (2009, 2010), and McKenzie and Stooke (2007, 2012) have observed young children in library settings. The studies show that library activities for children are complex communicative spaces and that it is important to achieve balance between leisure and learning during the activities. Stooke and McKenzie (2009, 673) argue that in recent years children's librarians have adopted more "school-like" literacy practices, which could alienate participants. Other studies using observations as a method for studying young children in libraries are Nichols (2011),

Hultgren and Johansson (2013), and Elkin (2014). These studies do not explicitly encompass corporeal aspects but do acknowledge the body as an information source and consider, for example, bodily activities and interactions. Furthermore, the main empirical data in these articles relate to the body, and the analyses focus on practices and interactions involving the body and bodies. Still, embodiment and embodied aspects of the studied phenomenon are not explicitly theorized in the above-mentioned articles. Few studies have focused on the impact of library programs for the development of literacy among children. One exception is a study by Graham and Gagnon (2013). We have not come across any empirical studies exploring the corporeal aspects of literacy practices for very young children in libraries, neither from the children's nor the librarians' perspective.

There are, however, a number of LIS studies focusing on the corporeal aspects of workplace learning (see Somerville and Lloyd 2006; Lloyd 2010; Bonner and Lloyd 2011; Olsson 2016) and in leisure activities (Gorichanaz 2015; Cox, Griffin and Hartel 2017). Another relevant strand of research concerns reading as an embodied practice. While earlier research on the understanding of reading and literacy have primarily focused on cognitive and intellectual dimensions, and to a lesser extent on the bodily and material aspects of the reading experience, there are some researchers exploring the bodily procedures of reading (McLaughlin 2015) and the concept of embodied cognition in relation to reading (Glenberg 2011; Mangen and Schilab 2012). As these studies discuss reading and the body through the lens of literary theory, they may also provide a solid starting point for theorizing the role of the body in literacy practices and on the different bodily aspects played out during library activities.

The literature on librarians' professional knowledge is fairly extensive. Some of these contributions have focused on what may be described as the core of librarians' knowledge domain, persistent over time (e.g., Jansson 2010). Today, several researchers pay interest in the various specializations and new areas of librarians' expertise (e.g., Cox and Corrall 2013). However, in this study we have chosen to focus more on the different, coexisting forms of professional knowledge, especially the situated and embodied knowing developed in social practice. As the traditional criteria of professional knowledge are rooted in the ideals of unique, abstract, and theoretical knowledge, other forms of knowledge, associated with, for example, labor and manual work, are generally ascribed lower status (see Lloyd 2014). Against this backdrop, it is more intriguing to look into the bodily aspects of librarians' knowledge.

In an LIS context, the study at hand is rare in that its knowledge contribution partly is based on an investigation of the corporeal aspects of librarians' work and professional knowledge. Moreover, it adds to the rather small proportion of LIS studies addressing very young children.

Background and Method

The article draws on empirical material gathered for a study conducted in cooperation with the Regional Library of Uppsala, Sweden, during 2016–2017. Through the observation of library programs and through interviews conducted with librarians working in those programs, the researchers analyzed how libraries work with infants and their families (Hedemark and Nagorsen Kastlander 2017). Public libraries, not just in Sweden but in several countries, have a tradition of providing programs that introduce very young children and their caregivers to reading and support the development of emergent literacy. The American Library Association has, since the beginning of the 2000s, worked with a project called *Every Child Ready to Read*. In Australia a similar project called *Better Beginnings* has been initiated. The specific project studied in the county of Uppsala was called *The Web of Language* (see Danielsson 2016) and ran between 2010 and 2012, after which it was incorporated as a permanent part of the public libraries' activities for young children. The libraries in Uppsala cooperate with child healthcare centers to inform parents about the programs.

The empirical material consists of a transcript from one focus-group interview with seven children's librarians, and field notes from a series of seven documented observations of program sessions at three public libraries. The number of participants in the sessions varied from four to fifteen children, each one in the company of an adult. All children were three to nine months old. The libraries are anonymized in the study through the use of fictional city names: Springfield, Shelbyville, and Ogdenville. The focus-group interview gathered seven children's librarians, each responsible for the programs at their respective library. The interview took place at the region's central library and lasted for approximately two hours. It was recorded and transcribed, resulting in a transcript of twenty-six pages. The participants were all female, with varied professional experience. All quotations and excerpts from field notes are reported verbatim and have been translated into English by the authors. Table 1 shows the empirical material produced through different methods and in different settings.

Before each session, notes were made to document the setup of the room and the material the librarian was planning to use. During the sessions, field notes were taken; we used no observation template but focused particularly on observing the interactions (both verbal and nonverbal) between the participants and the material used. Even though there was a large number of participants (see table 1) to keep track of, making observing quite challenging, we believe we managed to capture the essential and most important interactions. In accordance with Swedish ethical guidelines for research (Vetenskapsrådet 2011), we gained consent from the adult participants. One of the authors conducted the interviews and the observations, while both have been engaged in the analysis and writing.

Table 1. Overview of the empirical data

Method	Venue	Approx. duration	Number of participants	Age of the children	Staff
observation	Ogdenville	one hour	10 cg, 10 ch, 3 older siblings	six to eight months	one librarian, one researcher
observation	Springfield (1)	one hour	5 cg, 5 ch	six months	one librarian, one researcher
observation	Springfield (2)	one hour	10 cg, 10 ch	six months	one librarian, one researcher
observation	Springfield (3)	one hour	16 cg, 15 ch	three to six months	one librarian, one researcher
observation	Springfield (4)	one hour	7 cg, 7 ch	six months	one librarian, one researcher
observation	Shelbyville (1)	one hour	10 cg, 10 ch	two to seven months	one librarian, one child-care nurse, one researcher
observation	Shelbyville (2)	one hour	4 cg, 4 ch	six to eight months	one librarian, one researcher
focus-group interview	Uppsala	two hours	7 children's librarians		one researcher conducting the interview, one assistant taking notes

Note: *cg* stands for caregivers and *ch* stands for children.

Theoretical Concepts and Analysis

Our analysis draws from a number of different theoretical concepts. New Literacy Studies have provided us with the concepts *literacy activities* and *literacy practices*. *Literacy activities* are embodied *acts*, in other words they take place in real time and in specific physical spaces. To this concept we add the notion of *practice*, which entails acts/activities but also includes historically, institutionally, and materially grounded values and norms affecting the way things are done (see Street 2000, 2003; Barton 2007).

In line with Haas and Witte (2001, 417), who assert that "the body is a cultural, social, and linguistic construct, embodiment is lived experience," we assume a difference between the *body* and *embodiment*. The latter often represents itself as a kind of felt sense, and we will present some examples of this, for instance, when librarians talk about the professional knowledge they use in the library programs. Embodiment as a corporeal experience has not been explored in LIS to a large extent. The theoretical construct of the body has, however, been the subject of many studies in feminist and cultural studies (e.g., Butler 1993; Grosz 1994). In these theoretical discussions, the body is seen as a socially inscribed body, materialized through discourses. Foucault's influence on this theorizing of the body has been massive, and the body has in many cases been viewed as a text to be read, alongside other cultural expressions (see Foucault 1979).

The concept of *embodiment* on the other hand, calls for a more active notion of the body. *Embodiment* is not only a discursive construction but acts, communicates, and refers to lived experiences, which are always embedded in specific material, social, and institutional practices. Different forms of embodiments are routinized and habituated, which means that bodies have developed "culturally typical ways of being and doing" (O'Loughlin 1998, 285). In line with Lloyd (2010), we view literacy, as expressed in these activities, as an embodied practice—not just in the sense that the body of the individual participant acts as a point of reference for a person, but also in the sense that literacy practices enacted during the activities have an evident physical dimension. In this study the concept of *literacy*, therefore, becomes an empirical concept since it entails what is expressed—both verbally and physically —during the library programs. This is our conceptualization of literacy and should not be confused with the way librarians talk about literacy as a professional object. An analysis of the latter is not within the scope of this study.

A qualitative content analysis (Zhang and Wildemuth 2017) was undertaken, where the transcript and field notes were initially examined on the concrete level of the participants' accounts and doings. The empirical material was then interpreted further with an analytical focus on the concepts of *literacy activities*, *embodiment*, and *literacy practices*. Thereby, the analysis pays attention to actual activities as they are manifested in the participants' doings and sayings, without neglecting the exploration of these activities

on a more conceptual and interpretative level. During this process the authors have alternated between working individually and together to be able to compare, challenge, and enhance the analysis.

Findings

The Body in Literacy Activities

Three different types of *literacy activities* were identified: the librarian informed parents about library services for children and how they could use the library; the librarian educated the parents about their roles as "teachers" in supporting their children's early literacy development; and the librarian read, rhymed, and sang to the children and encouraged both parents and children to participate.

The analysis indicates that corporeal aspects form a significant part of the various activities in these kinds of library programs. The activities engaged the participants in a number of different bodily ways. First, the sharing of rhymes and songs normally includes the performance of physical movements, involving children, parents, and librarians. A second expression of the corporeal dimension is when librarians describe reading to very young children as a focused and conscious act, encouraging the parents to use artifacts from their everyday life to enact the story in the book. Third, the librarians' typically state that it is important for children to experience books with all their senses, by, for instance, biting and tasting books, in order to become acquainted with them through physical sensation.

Sharing of rhymes and songs. One activity that played out in all the observed sessions was when the librarian reads, sings, and rhymes for the children, often encouraging the caregivers to join in. The children either sit in the parent's lap or in a foam rubber "baby pool" that enables the children to sit upright by supporting their backs.

> In Springfield (1) the librarian takes a picture book, shows the children the picture, in this case of an animal, and mimics the sound of the animal. The children look at the picture, look at the librarian as she makes the sound, and some of the children stretch their hands towards the book and try to grab it. When they manage to get hold of the book, they often "taste" the book by putting it into their mouths.

In this example the babies deliberately move their bodies and interact with the librarian and the material used in this literacy activity. When rhyming, it is instead the children's parents that move the bodies of the children, as in this example from Springfield (3):

> Librarian: "We will try [the rhyme]. Put your baby on your lap." The librarian has a doll in her lap. She reads the rhyme and demonstrates by moving the doll's arms and legs how the parents can manipulate

> their babies' limbs. Several of the parents follow her lead and mimic the librarian's movements with the doll with their children. The librarian reads another rhyme with different movements and finishes off with a song that entails certain physical movements.

Although the children are too young to move their bodies in controlled and deliberate ways, as we can see in the example above, their arms and legs are manipulated by their parents in order to follow the physical manifestations of chanting. The rhymes are, so to speak, inscribed in the bodies of the babies (see Foucault 1979) and the *literacy practice* thereby becomes an embodied practice where both children and adults participate. The previous quotation also illustrates how the professional know-how (as in using movements when rhyming) of the librarian have an embodied practical dimension that during the sessions are shared with the parents. The rhymes mediated by the librarians are located in the mind but also in the arms and fingers of each librarian as bodily dispositions. Yakhlef (2010, 420) describes this as "a kind of knowledge in the hands" that comes "available" in and through interactions. This also relates to Lloyd's (2010) point that our bodies disseminate information through the way others read our bodies. In other words, the way the librarians rhyme, sing, and move their bodies are read off as information by the parents. The rhyming and singing displayed at the sessions is an aural phenomenon, but at the same time the activities entail visual information, such as the librarian's movements. These thus become an integral part of the experience (see Cox, Griffin, and Hartel 2017).

The librarians stress the importance of these corporeal aspects of literacy activities. For example they deliberately encourage the parents to incorporate physical movements when rhyming and reading to children. In Shelbyville (2) the librarian explicitly states that "we can use the body to teach children words" and "the body and movement—everything helps the children learn the language." In fact, one of the reasons for using rhymes is, according to the librarian, to "make a ritual of a storytelling situation, to mark the beginnings and ends so the children anticipate what is going to happen. This anticipation is noticeable in the body; they know what is going to happen in their bodies" (Shelbyville 2). These statements clearly indicate a belief that the little child's body and what it senses plays a significant role when it comes to early literacy development. The development of early literacy skills is, thus, in these instances, treated by the librarians as an embodied process—not as a purely cognitive and intellectual one (cf. Lloyd 2010). In the next section we will pay close attention to how librarians present the act of reading for babies to the parents.

Reading as an embodied practice. Concerning different forms of corporeal engagement, we have to this point focused on children's, librarians' and parents' interactions and how they use their bodies in literacy activities.

The notion of the body's role is further enhanced in another literacy activity that occurred in all sessions: the librarian "educates" the parents about how they can support the children's early literacy development. In this example from observation 4 at Springfield, the librarian presents different children's books for the parents:

> The librarian says: "One example [of children's literature] is Emma Adbåge [Swedish author], and she has written about the body in a book called *Little Nose*." The librarian shows the book to the parents and says: "All books in this series can inspire conversations about what the little body has done in the real world."

As the statement shows, the act of reading is presented as a process involving the child's body in an active and vital way. The librarian suggests that, when reading with children, the parents should relate the pictures and the stories in the books to the child's own body—in this example the nose—or the actual context the child is living in, such as in the following example: "The librarian informs the parents about how to use books in different ways. She exemplifies by presenting a book called *Playing Peekaboo* and states, 'When you read this book you can use things at home such as your quilt'" (Springfield 2). What the librarian refers to is that parents and children can enact the story in the book—playing peekaboo—by using everyday items such as a quilt. The book thus becomes related to the "real" physical world surrounding the child, making the act of reading embodied. Reading with children is, during the sessions, described by the librarians as a bodily act that entails hands, eyes, movements, and interactions with different bodies and physical artifacts. McLaughlin (2015, 2), argues that "reading is a physical practice that requires a vast social pedagogy." A similar kind of social or didactic pedagogy is both verbally and nonverbally mediated and displayed by the librarians during the sessions.

Biting the books. As stated in the previous section, librarians present reading as a practice with concrete corporeal dimensions. Typically they argue that the children should be provided the opportunity to experience and master literacy with their whole bodies—mouths, hands, senses, and through movement. The librarians also emphasize the importance of letting children practice the bodily procedures of reading and to physically interact with the book and the material aspects of this medium (see McLaughlin 2015). For example, in Springfield (2) the librarian says to the parents: "The children should get a chance to figure out that this is a book, this is how you handle it, this is how you turn the page . . . what you do, they take after." Also noticeable in the last part of this statement is that the parents are portrayed as role models. They should lead through good example, by being readers and showing children how to handle a book. As illustrated below, librarians not only assure the parents that it is

ok for the children to "taste" the books; they explicitly acknowledge the children's need of experiencing books physically. The following excerpt comes from the librarians' discussion in the focus group: "For a baby it is entirely normal to bite [books]. Yes, exactly. You have to use all your senses" (Focus-group interview).

Similar to the librarian's behavior and comments during the observation sessions, the librarians in the focus-group interview express the importance of addressing the "chewing" aspect during sessions. One librarian states: "Parents think they can't come to the library because their children eat books. If you say to them that this is okay, it's a big relief for them—then they sort of think they can come [to the library]." The underlying assumption of this statement is that parents avoid the library because they assume that they are required to behave in certain ways in the library. You are expected to be quiet and treat books gently, not cause any commotion. The librarians claim that one important objective of library programs is to change these preconceived notions and introduce another image of the library to the parents. The library is, therefore, portrayed as an undemanding place, and focus is put on presenting the different physical facilities that a parent with a baby might need, such as a place for breastfeeding, a place to change diapers, and the possibility to heat food or babies' bottles.

As stated earlier, the concept of *embodiment* entails the idea that bodies develop routinized and cultural ways of being and doing. This also applies to reading, which can be seen as a habitual bodily practice—as McLaughlin (2015, 2) puts it: "bodies read." The ways babies hold books, scan the pictures with their eyes, and taste books by putting them into their mouths can be seen as the first steps toward learning the practice of reading. It is not only the brain that needs to manage the task of reading—the hands and eyes; in fact the whole body must socialize the procedures of reading (McLaughlin 2015). The literacy activities in the library programs for babies reflect this bodily notion of reading. As enacted during the observed sessions, reading books, singing, and rhyming with children are literacy practices that engage all senses of the children. In the following section, we will take a closer look at how the librarian uses his/her own *body as a professional tool* in the interactions with children and parents.

Corporeal Aspects of Professional Work and Knowledge

Librarians clearly constitute a group occupied with a great variety of very concrete tasks and work methods, at the same time seriously concerned with contemporary expectations regarding evidence-based work (Connor 2007). While professional knowledge often is associated with formal and abstract knowledge, preferably documented in textual media, our findings support a more nuanced understanding of librarians' knowledge, also comprising corporeal aspects. In the following we show how professional knowledge is shaped and expressed in bodily interaction.

The body as a professional tool. The librarians tend to change modes in communicating with the babies and the parents, respectively, during the programs. It is obvious that as soon as they turn to the babies they switch into another mode, addressing the children in a more physical manner. This could be described as using a repertoire of embodied tools of communication. For example, the librarians normally sit down during these gatherings, but, while actively seeking the children's attention, they often lie down, crawl, and approach the babies:

> [The librarian] starts reading to the children, leans forward and directs her attention to one baby at a time. It becomes quiet for a short while. The children look at [the librarian], they focus on her finger pointing at the pictures repeatedly. (Turning to the parents) "Did you see that? He tracked my hand to see the picture and then he looks at my mouth and face. I'm not familiar to him though, so just imagine how much more you could make of it." (Shelbyville 2)

As the babies at the sessions are obviously unable to speak, the librarians occasionally use other oral and auditory forms of expression to attract the children's attention. Making sounds by drumming, clapping, knocking, and so forth are common ways to attract the children's eyes and ears. Several children's books are also designed to be supported by these kinds of physical activities, such as the popular picture books *Knacka på* (Knocking on) and *Trycka knappen* (Push the button)."[2] A similar take on this is related to the frequent occurrence of animals in the books. In almost every session observed, librarians produce various animal vocalizations. Sometimes the sounds are combined with movements and artifacts other than books, such as simple rhythm instruments and selected toys.

> [The librarian] picks up a book about animals. "Lookie, lookie!" She imitates a hen and says "here is the hen," stretching out to show the picture to the children. Some of the children whimper a little, but most of them look and listen. Some chortle. As [the librarian] holds the book in front of them, some of them try to grab it and pat it with their hands. They listen observantly to [the librarian] as she produces various animal sounds. (Springfield 2)

Some of the interviewed librarians express that their engagement in professional practice over time has resulted in a certain *sense* (see Lloyd 2014) for tuning into the right level of communication with babies. This sense is perceived as helpful, guiding their work during library programs as a form of embodied judgement.

> My self-confidence in the groups—not having children of my own—it builds on . . . it's the experience of meeting children in groups that successively has made me connect better with them. I know approximately at what level to approach them. Before I didn't always read to the children, but now I do, and I notice that it adds lots of value. (Focus-group interview)

The quotation illustrates how a certain sense may develop over time, described by the librarian as self-confidence. We understand it as professional know-how, derived from the physical experience of spending time and communicating with young children. The quoted librarian has learned to trust this sense as part of her professional repertoire. Being communicative and responsive to the children seems to be at the heart of literacy-promoting activities, according to what is discussed in the focus group. This quality includes being flexible and adaptable to the children's needs and moods.

Coziness and magic. Statements about the physical context, the particular space where the baby sessions are held, are recurrent. Notably this context includes not only the room and the props but also human bodily closeness. A certain intimate atmosphere is obviously sought to support communication between librarian and the baby. In the librarians' accounts, the adjective *cozy* is used frequently, and so is the associated noun *coziness.* Coziness seems to capture the desirable state of well-being and intimacy surrounding child and adult as they engage in books together. By talking to the caregivers in terms of coziness, the librarians clearly signal that reading ideally works as a shared, undemanding, and enjoyable activity. The following two excerpts come from the focus group with library practitioners.

> The most important thing is that . . . you have to stress the importance of this being something cozy, that it's enjoyable. . . . That's what you want to get through.

> But when it comes to inspiring them and getting them started [to read] – if they haven't done that, it very much depends on lust and . . . coziness, sort of.

The same line of reasoning is present in the observations of library programs where librarians "educate" the parents. Despite the prominent discourse praising the virtues of literacy (especially book reading), the librarians tend to subordinate utility perspectives to the relational qualities of shared reading experiences. "Librarian: 'Songs and rhymes also stimulate the brain. You can borrow song books at the library, but first and foremost it is cozy!'" (Springfield 3).

During the observed library sessions, the librarians focus explicitly on encouraging and empowering caregivers to become reading companions and rolemodels for the young children. But they also make clear that they themselves, as librarians, are experienced storytellers with unique working methods and communicative skills. With reference to the combined competencies of providing suitable books and being able to attract the children's attention, the librarians sometimes talk about their ability to actually create magic (see Hedemark and Lindberg 2017):

> Librarian: "It's about opening the book and showing them how to turn the pages, showing that this is how to read. Put the children in the baby pool and we'll see if they're ready for a fairy tale." (All babies are placed into the pool).
>
> "What you can do to make the children focus on me is to be quiet, and then we'll see if we can make some magic!" (Springfield 1)

If the question of librarians' professional knowledge and work was to be addressed in a more formal professional context, it is hard to imagine that the ability to provide coziness and magic would be emphasized as in the excerpt above. Still, the pattern is quite clear when the children's librarians themselves describe their work and striving. In the next section we will elaborate on this.

Compete or complete. As mentioned, the library programs are part of a common project including both the library and the child-care center. The common professional objects for all involved are reading promotion and literacy development. Child-care workers who recommend parents to take part in library programs seldom join the activity themselves, and against this backdrop it is noteworthy that both librarians and the parents seem to focus much on the children's social, physical, and intellectual development during the sessions—aspects typically associated with child-care nurses' knowledge domains. As parents occasionally ask the librarians about children's developmental stages and their conquering of cognitive skills, it can be noticed that this interest sometimes seems to collide with the librarian's aforementioned vision of an undemanding, sensual, and emotional approach to common book experiences.

When the librarians in the focus group reflect upon their competence, some of them explicitly regret that they are not as knowledgeable about the nurse's areas of expertise as they would like to be. Other related knowledge domains are also mentioned as valuable in the interaction with children and caregivers:

> We've had some collaboration with the speech therapists, so we've learned a bit about that. At least I've read reports—some research reports—that I can refer to. And, of course, I tell them, "I'm not a speech therapist, but I have read this, and we do cooperate with speech therapists." Clearly you can say something; I mean we know more than just anybody about language development. We've read some. (Focus-group interview)

One of the librarians then turns this line of reasoning around by arguing that the children's nurses in the literacy project do experience the same thing:

> They feel that they don't know the things librarians know, because we know the literature. They may know about language development and

> what they [the children] should be able to do at various ages and stuff, but choosing suitable books for each age is out of their comfort zone. (Focus-group interview)

In the focus group it becomes clear that talk about professional competence is not that frequent at the librarians' workplaces. The discussion in itself seems to raise a common and more nuanced understanding of concurrent areas of expertise in concert rather than competition. The very process of discussing these matters within the focus group seemed to contribute to more dynamic and confident approaches to one's own expertise and its relation to that of others:

> "No, and there's no competition, sort of; we have different entries. I want to communicate the joy of books, what it may stand for and how it may help the parents. I don't think that's the same . . . the child-care nurse talks more about how the body's organs develop, so it's a completely different, more biological . . ."
>
> "Exactly."
>
> "But that doesn't mean there's a conflict. I rather think that we have . . . that we meet the same children, the same parents. How can we . . . attack [*sic*!] them from various perspectives so that they hear it from both child healthcare and from the library. That we kind of . . ."
>
> "And on those occasions when I was accompanied by a child healthcare nurse, we strengthened our respective roles and emphasized language development and reading together. They were no quiet spectators and neither was I . . . we talked about this together." (Focus-group interview)

What was initially spoken of in terms of lacking knowledge turned out to be identified as other professional competences, held by, for example, nurses and speech therapists. At this point the librarians emphasized that literature and reading promotion actually constitute their own, unique area of expertise. Sharing the ambition of literacy development among children, the different professional groups seem to complement each other rather well (cf. Nolin 2008). At least this is the "ideal" picture of interprofessional collaboration that emerges during the talk. Still, being reminded of the lack of healthcare expertise by the parents' questions, some librarians tend to doubt their own competence.

It is striking that the children's librarians, while specifically discussing the competence of their own group, do not mention the special know-how that manifested itself during the observations. The capacity of providing a "cozy" space and a "magical" reading experience does not seem to be fully acknowledged as a professional competence (see Abbott 1998). On the other hand, literature and fiction—both mentioned by the interviewees—are indeed subjects of both art and academic disciplines, which plausibly make them more thinkable and mentionable as professional knowledge domains.

The Embodied Literacy Practice of Library Programs

In summary, the study shows how bodies act as sites of information and communication (see Lloyd 2014). Not only the bodies of the librarians but also the bodies of parents and the children act as central sites, affecting literacy practices during library programs. The corporeal dimensions of reading were strongly emphasized during the sessions, and parents were encouraged to let children interact with books in a physical way. Indeed, reading—but also singing and rhyming—are presented as processes mainly involving the child's body. The general idea being that if the little body is inscribed with language through songs, rhyme, and books, the mind will eventually follow. As McLaughlin (2015) suggests, the bodily procedures of reading must first be consciously taught and learned, but these physical tasks of reading must end up in an embodied and thus unconscious and internalized practice. In other words, the librarians' emphasis on the reading body has a pragmatic goal—the making of a reader. In this continued process, the parents play the most important role, hence the need to educate the caregivers and prepare them for becoming their children's first teachers.

It can be noticed that conjoined with these corporeal aspects there is a simultaneous ongoing caring practice directed toward the babies, mainly engaging the parents, but in some cases also the librarian. The presence of caring practices in the library has been demonstrated by other researchers (see McKenzie and Stooke 2007; Hultgren and Johansson 2013). McKenzie and Stooke (2007, 12) demonstrate in a study of story-time programs for young children how the room during these sessions transforms "from a sitting-and-watching space to a moving-and-touching space." We claim that during the observed library programs, the room is constantly a moving-and-touching space where caregivers hold, rock, lift, entertain, and feed the babies. The atmosphere during the sessions is close and cozy, almost intimate, and the enacted literacy activities are intertwined and sometimes interrupted by the babies' needs for food and sleep.

Up to this point we have used the concepts *caregivers* or *parents* when we talk about the adult participants, but in almost all cases the attendees are the mothers of the babies (at one session both the father and the mother of a child were present). In all observed sessions, the librarians are female, and library programs can, overall, be described as a female-intensive (see Harris 1992) undertaking. This female intensity may affect the doings and sayings played out during the sessions. As earlier stated, and in line with O'Loughlin (1998), we claim that bodies are part of the social world, and, therefore, their doings and sayings develop in a cultural context. How people conduct themselves does not take place in a vacuum—as we discussed earlier: the individual's ways of being, for example, forms of embodiment, are habituated (O'Loughlin 1998, 285). Sarah Ruddick (1980) demonstrates how the socially constructed female

body may foster a certain maternal practice guided by mothers' engagement in children's well-being and the fostering of physical, emotional, and intellectual growth of children. In line with Ruddick, we believe a kind of maternal practice is expressed during the sessions—this practice is closely conjoined and intertwined with librarians' work with early literacy.

As previously mentioned, professional knowledge has traditionally been characterized not only as abstract, research-based, and advanced but also as unique and monopolized by the professional groups in question (Abbott 1998). In the case of children's librarians, it has been shown that professional knowledge as an intrinsic part of professional identity may be perceived as vague (Hedemark and Lindberg 2017). For example, it is sometimes difficult to capture and describe the refinement and the uniqueness in a competence partly intertwined with maternal practices (see Ruddick 1980). Central elements in this vagueness are the informality and deliberately undemanding setting for the babies' programs (which is rather atypical in "normal" client-expert interactions) and the lack of elaborate professional vocabulary. In this study we have noticed that the ways children's librarians put their professional activities into words are also similar in the library programs (addressing parents) and in the focus group (discussing with colleagues).

Conclusion

In this final section we present the main findings and the overall conclusions from the empirical study.

Q1. To conclude, the body in literacy activities identified during library programs manifests itself in several ways. We have described how caregivers are instructed to *move their children's arms and legs* in line with certain rhymes mediated by the librarian as a way of stimulating early literacy skills. Bodily aspects are also put forth as librarians *talk about children's literacy development*. Another corporeal dimension is how reading together with children is described as an *embodied act*, where librarians suggest to parents how to make use of different artifacts when reading and to let their babies engage physically with books by experiencing them with all senses.

Q2. All in all, the observations and accounts of the children's librarians indicate that corporeality is a highly present and integrated dimension of their professional work and knowledge in the specific context of programs for young children. We have shown how the librarians interact with babies and their caregivers, *using their own bodies and senses as tools* for both verbal and nonverbal communication. Working with the youngest children's literacy development tends to nurture an *embodied sense* and judgement related to the specific user group. Putting their professional competence into words, the librarians sometimes express ambivalence, on the one hand fully convinced of the value of stimulating literacy and the ability to share "cozy" and prestige-less reading experiences with others,

and, on the other hand, occasionally doubtful of their actual expertise, as other professional groups seem to hold more advanced and exclusive knowledge about the children's physiological needs. In this respect, the librarians' corporeal know-how resides in their bodies and in the interaction with others. Moreover, they also display knowledge about the bodily and sensory aspects of literacy.

Q3. In summary, the results show that literacy activities for babies in library programs involve the body in many different ways; bodily aspects are clearly important and characterize the literacy practice taking place during the sessions. The *literacy practices of information mediation and learning are identified as coexisting and intertwined* in the setting of library programs for babies. The professional objective of the librarians is to contribute to early literacy by educating parents about the "right way" to stimulate this development. The children are also engaged as parts in this process. As stated by Lloyd and other researchers (see, e.g., Fenwick 2003), the role of the body in learning has been devalued. In both formal and informal educational contexts, abstract learning is generally privileged and associated with higher status (Lloyd 2014). In contrast, *the kind of learning taking place in library programs is to a great extent practical, material, and concrete* in its nature. The different status ascribed to the respective forms of knowledge may have *implications for how children's librarians' professional knowledge is perceived*, both by themselves and by other professional groups. As we have shown, the *librarians have some trouble articulating embodied knowledge as part of their professional knowledge*, making it essentially a tacit practice-based knowledge (see Mulcahy 2000). To understand the complex literacy practice played out in the library, *attention needs to be payed to the corporeal interactions and embodied knowledge in practice.* Thereto, the professional senses of the children's librarians need to be acknowledged.

The results of this study hopefully contribute to the understanding of present activities and challenges in the professional practices of librarians, especially regarding programs directed toward the target groups of parents and very young children. Obviously, that is at the heart of our interests as LIS researchers. Still, the more specific aim of this paper has been to introduce, test, and show the usefulness of the corporeally oriented toolset that is currently challenging and gaining ground within our field. Having found a combination of concepts from LIS and New Literacy Studies fruitful in this empirical setting, we suggest it for further application and elaboration in other settings and contexts.

Notes

1. In this case, Swedish public libraries have developed a partnership with child healthcare centers where the latter encourage groups of parents and babies to take part in sessions at the library. These sessions have the specific goal of supporting the literacy of families, in particular very young children.
2. Authored by Anna Clara Tidholm and Lotta Olsson, respectively.

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